

Appalachian Forest National Heritage Area Designated

National Heritage Area designation for Appalachian Forest National Heritage Area became official with the President's signing on March 12 of S.47, the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act, the also known as the Natural Resources Management Act.

The Bill also included a wide variety of designations and land management bills from across the country, including the Sportsman Act and permanent reauthorization of the Land and Water Conservation Fund. The bipartisan bill passed in the Senate on February 12, and in the House on February 26, by overwhelming majorities.

Sen. Joe Manchin, sponsor of the original Appalachian Forest National Heritage Area Act, and a co-sponsor of the Senate Natural Resources Management Act, said "The Appalachian Forest Heritage Area is a treasure that has done a great deal for West Virginia. This national designation is long overdue."

The Appalachian Forest designation bill was also co-sponsored in the Senate by Sen. Shelley Moore Capito, Sen. Ben Cardin, and Sen. Chris Van Hollen.

The companion House bill is sponsored by Rep. David McKinley, with co-sponsors in the previous session from Rep. Evan Jenkins, Rep. John Delaney, and Rep. Alex Mooney, and in the current session adding co-sponsors Rep. Carol Miller and Rep. David Trone.

"Creating an Appalachian Forest National Heritage Area will allow us to continue to celebrate and promote the beauty of our state, preserve our heritage and plan for the future," Rep. McKinley said of the legislation. "National Heritage Areas deliver a significant economic return and helps us showcase the sometimes-hidden gems of our cultural heritage."

"We are incredibly excited to be finally receiving National Heritage Area designation for the Appalachian Forest," said Phyllis Baxter, Executive Director of Appalachian Forest Heritage Area, Inc, the coordinating entity for the newly designated area. "We have been working on this for fifteen years, and are so pleased to now be nationally recognized. This designation will increase our visibility to attract tourism, and increase our capacity to help local communities."

National Heritage Areas are designated by Congress as places where natural, cultural, and historic resources combine to form a cohesive, nationally important landscape. With the official national heritage area designation the Appalachian Forest National Heritage Area can earn recognition as being nationally significant, and will have access to National Park Service technical assistance and funding to provide more services to the region.

The Appalachian Forest Heritage Area works in 16 counties of West Virginia and 2 counties of western Maryland on conservation, forestry, cultural heritage, tourism and community development. With the overall theme of forest heritage, the initiative works with willing partners to explore and enhance the relationship between the forested mountains and the people who live here.

For more information see www.appalachianforest.us, email afha@appalachianforest.us, or call 304-636-6182.

For more information on the Senate Natural Resources Management Act : Senator Manchin's press release: <https://www.manchin.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/manchin-secures-significant-west-virginia-wins-in-public-lands-package>

Senator Capito's press release <https://www.capito.senate.gov/news/press-releases/capito-votes-to-pass-comprehensive-public-lands-legislation>

Senators Van Hollen and Cardin press release <https://www.vanhollen.senate.gov/news/press-releases/van-hollen-cardin-historical-and-conservation-priorities-pass-the-senate>

Congressman McKinley's press release <https://mckinley.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=1545>